

# THE BIG MUDDY

## The River of the Lewis and Clark expedition – Part 2

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

## THE SETTLEMENT OF MISSOURI

The door to the Missouri River region was thrown wide open with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. In what is perhaps the greatest real estate deal in history, the United States purchased the territories stretching from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains from France for the sum of \$15 million. This purchase more than doubled the territory of the United States, and eventually 13 states would be formed out of this region. This event made the expedition by Lewis and Clark even more important. This was a time before airplanes, roads and other forms of modern transportation, and the rivers served as the primary travel routes for everything from settler's families to trade goods and raw materials. The Missouri River cut right through the heart this newly acquired territory and was destined to serve as the main route of entry for generations of settlers.



The United States Congress formally opened Missouri to settlement in 1818. As American settlers began to pour into the area, disputes over land between American Indians and settlers soon arose. Many parts of Missouri had been previously designated as Indian reservations for the displaced tribes from Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. The government responded to settler complaints by moving most of the Indian tribes to reservation lands even further west. Eventually all the American Indian populations that lived in the



Missouri region would be completely displaced by the incoming American settlers.

Initial patterns of settlement followed the Missouri River. The land in the river flood plain was fertile and trade goods and supplies could be transported up and down the river to St. Louis. The St. Louis region was fast becoming a major center of activity due to its strategic location at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Lead mining, a historically important economic activity for the region, also drew many settlers into southern regions of the state. These first generations of settlers were a tough and independent breed. Many lived in remote locations and provided for their own needs by planting family gardens and hunting the large numbers of deer, turkey, bear and buffalo to be found.

Farming, mining and trading of supplies soon developed into major industries and large areas became settled. The labor-intensive nature of these activities brought slavery to Missouri. By the early 1800s slaves made up as much as 15 percent of the population. While Missouri was officially a slave state, slave ownership declined during the period leading up to the Civil War. During the war Missouri was officially part of the Union. Several important battles of the war were fought on Missouri soil such as the battles of Wilson's Creek, Fort Davidson, Lexington, Athens and Carthage. At the end of the Civil War, Governor Thomas C. Fletcher officially ended slavery in Missouri on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1865, by executive proclamation.

The lands of the Missouri River have certainly changed since the time of Lewis and Clark. Many areas along the edge of the river now support intensive agricultural operations or are highly urbanized. The river itself has been narrowed for transportation and flood control and today several dams interrupt its flow to the sea. When Missouri became a state in 1821 its population was estimated at 66,000 residents. By 1860 that number had risen to more than a million. Today, almost 6 million people call Missouri their home. When the Lewis and Clark expedition headed up the river in 1804, St. Louis only contained 180 houses. By 1840 the population of St. Louis had grown to 16,000, and today it is estimated to be more than 700,000 residents.

**FOR ADDITIONAL  
INFORMATION:**

***FINDING MISSOURI- Our History and Heritage***

Missouri Department of Elementary Education, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, State Historical Society of Missouri.

***THE EARLY SETTLERS OF  
SOUTHWEST MISSOURI***

History Department Web site: Southwest Missouri State University  
<http://history.smsu.edu/FTMiller/LocalHistory/Essays.htm>

***MISSOURI SETTLEMENT PATTERNS***

History Department Web site: Southwest Missouri State University  
<http://history.smsu.edu/FTMiller/LocalHistory/Maps/MOMaps/geog/setpat.htm>

***FORT OSAGE- National Historic Landmark***

[www.historicfortosage.com](http://www.historicfortosage.com)

***HISTORY OF THE PHYSICAL  
GROWTH OF THE CITY OF SAINT  
LOUIS***

Official City of St. Louis Web site  
<http://stlouis.missouri.org/heritage/History69/index.html>

***MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES Division of  
State Parks (see included insert for  
materials)***

